

5 Fairfield Street  
Newton, MA 02460  
January 26, 2003

Mr. Michael Powell, Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Mr. Powell:

I have written an article on "Civic leadership in Greater Boston," to be published in *Governing Greater Boston*, 2nd Edition, published by the Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. One of the topics of the article is the role of the media in civic leadership. Historical analysis and interviews with current community leaders indicated a dissatisfaction with the local television news media.

There is a sense that the news is more superficial and sensationalistic than it once was and that community issues such as local government, the activities of private non-profit organizations, housing, education, economic development, transportation, social relations, etc. are poorly covered on local television. Not many years ago television news was supposed to be balanced and different sides were supposed to be heard. In-depth discussions took place on complex matters of national and local interest. Some of those interviewed for my piece believe that the loss of local control of television stations and the homogenization of local news has brought about these changes.

Recently I read an op-ed piece you wrote for *USA Today* about why large media companies should be allowed to concentrate their power further by buying up as many television stations as possible. You said it does not matter to a free exchange of ideas because people can use the Internet. If the experience of recent years in Boston is any indication, you are mistaken in your reasoning. Having an Internet site does not equate with ownership a vast chain of tv and radio stations. Network news still sets the agenda, and Internet sites are marginal voices. Your argument does not make sense.

Much corporately-controlled local news blares out shallow packaged news bites and ignores a wide range of stories and opinions. The spectrum of news stories seems to avoid anything that would be critical of the media corporation's business or its control of the media.

Democracy and the vitality of civic life is the issue the FCC is deciding concerning the concentration of media ownership. Your op-ed piece said the key issue was the "free" market. The way you interpret "free" seems to be freedom to consolidate and create a monopoly, not the freedom of many companies to compete and provide different news products and report on different issues and ideas. Not the freedom of individuals and civic organizations to pursue the democratic exchange

of ideas. I urge you to reconsider your plan to permit virtually unlimited consolidation of local television stations under corporations for whom the bottom-line, not the give-and-take of democracy, is the paramount priority.

Yours,

James C. O'Connell